

Social inequality, mobility, and the illegitimate inheritance of status: recruitment and career patterns of GDR business elites

Salheiser, Axel

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Salheiser, A. (2010). Social inequality, mobility, and the illegitimate inheritance of status: recruitment and career patterns of GDR business elites. *Historical Social Research*, 35(3), 117-133. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.35.2010.3.117-133>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Social Inequality, Mobility, and the Illegitimate Inheritance of Status: Recruitment and Career Patterns of GDR Business Elites

Axel Salheiser*

Abstract: »Soziale Ungleichheit, Mobilität und illegitime Statusvererbung: Die Rekrutierungs- und Karrieremuster von DDR-Wirtschaftseliten«. Functional elites of the GDR, the so-called cadres, formed a rather large and inhomogeneous stratum of the socialist society. Empirical evidence based on quantitative analyses of large prosopographical and biographical datasets unveils paradoxical patterns of social inequality underlying the processes of recruitment and career mobility of cadres. Hereditary aspects had a greater impact on the allocation of social status than expected and thwarted the socialist project. Not only did a New Class or “socialist intelligentsia” emerge, increasing social closure also reverberated a distinguishably “bourgeois” tradition. In the 1980s, workers and cooperative farmers belonged to the most disadvantaged social strata in the “Workers’ and Peasants’ State”. While this could be observed for different sectors of the GDR society, economy in particular gave an instructive example. Factories and large industrial combines (*Kombinate*) were led by businessmen who often did not even have a documented worker’s origin. Instead, and in the first place, they boasted required aspects of high cultural capital, such as academic and special vocational training, and were politically reliable with regard to SED state party alignment and honorary functions. Thus, even the descendents of “capitalist” entrepreneurs, persons with a National Socialist family background or persons with a personal NS past had fairly good prospects to embark on careers in the GDR economy. The paper briefly discusses statistical analyses of data on higher executive personnel such as director generals (CEOs), branch directors, and heads of department.

Keywords: social inequality, mobility, GDR, cadres, economy, recruitment, careers, inheritance of status.

1. Introduction: East German Socialist Managers

Managers in the GDR (*Industriekader*), and, first of all, the directors of centrally-led industrial combines (which roughly translates to CEOs in capitalist

* Address all communications to: Axel Salheiser, Sonderforschungsbereich 580/Teilprojekt A1, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, 07743 Jena, Germany;
e-mail: axel.salheiser@uni-jena.de.

In a preliminary version, this paper was read at the ESSHC in Ghent, Belgium, in April 2010. I would like to thank Franziska Diller, Ronald Gebauer and Dietmar Remy for their help and critical remarks.

corporations) were state functionaries appointed by the Communist Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED). Thus, they had to be considered exponents of the East German socialist regime. But unlike Party secretaries who were solely bound to party loyalty and could rely on the power apparatus in the first place, the management cadres represented a social type that was genuinely determined by its ambiguous institutional embeddedness between production, markets and Marxism. The processing industry of the GDR was extremely centralized, well-developed and required well-trained leadership. Executing the production plan (which was a law by definition), coping with economic shortage and acting according to socialist moral principles at the same time was always a balancing act.

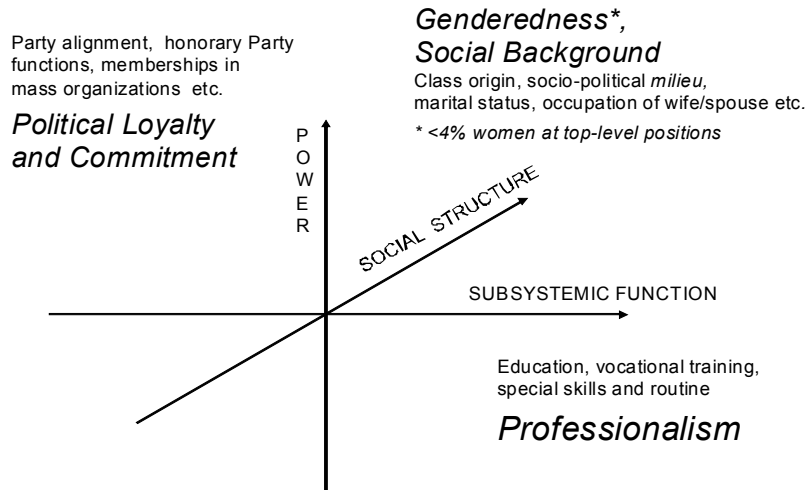
In this contribution, the social backgrounds, the socio-political family *milieus*, the professional training, and the party affiliation of industrial cadres are addressed. Also, the terms and conditions under which cadres were granted entrance to the echelons of upper management are examined. The analyses presented below are based on the Central Cadre Database CCDB (*Zentraler Kaderdatenspeicher, ZKDS*) of the Council of Ministers (*Ministerrat*) of the GDR. (For an in-depth analysis of cadre recruitment and careers in the GDR industry, along with a detailed discussion of important literature on the subject, cf. Salheiser 2009a. Salheiser 2009b offers another summery on top-level industry cadres.)

2. Main Criteria of Cadre Recruitment and Advancement

In order to embark on a cadre career, three sets of requirements had to be met: (1) political loyalty and commitment, or party alignment, (2) professionalism, or qualification, and (3) a cluster of social traits and assets whose most striking one was class background (Fig. 1).

They open a feature space in which political power structure, functional aspects of the societal subsystem (here: economy), and social structure are the three main dimensions. In past studies based on the CCDB, the impact of these dimensions of social differentiation could be repeatedly verified in Correspondence Analyses, amongst other statistical methods (cf. Best 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009).

Fig. 1: Legitimacy vs. Pragmatism: Main Criteria of Cadre Recruitment and Careers



Essential for my interpretation are the different degrees of freedom each dimension offers in order to maintain the functional capability and efficiency of a modern economy. While Communist Party membership and a particular class origin would be dispensable criteria under non-authoritarian circumstances, professionalism is clearly not. The legitimacy of the cadre hierarchy was fueled by the ideology of a society of workers led by workers, but to some extent this proved incompatible with structural restraints and practical necessities.

Following Stalin's observation of the importance of cadres in general, leading personnel for the industry was meticulously prepared, selected, guided, and educated (Fig. 2). GDR careers were highly consistent and, with the ubiquity of some career episodes, reflected the societal claim of creating a *homo socialisticus*. Cadre staff managers (*Kaderleiter*) sat at the levers of social engineering. The Communist Party's interest and care for family background was deeply rooted in sociological thought and had been ignited by the teachings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Engels had identified the family as the germ cell (*Keimzelle*) of society, and the theoretical concept of social mobility and the phenomenon of self-reproduction through family inheritance were introduced by Russian "*bourgeois*" sociologist Pitirim Sorokin as early as in 1926 (cf. Engels 1987, Sorokin 1926). In the communist understanding, capitalist class society threatened to come back in through the backdoor of the family. And as far as empirical evidence shows, one is inclined to support this thesis. Consistently, East German postwar socialism took a cybernetic approach of shaping

social structure by systematically diminishing the influence of the family on the allocation of status.

Fig. 2: Episodes of a Cadre Biography



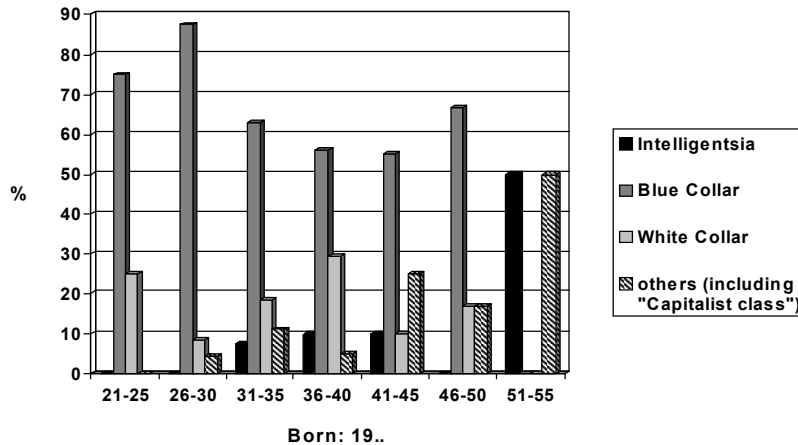
3. Social Background and Social Mobility

However, while early GDR social policy had fostered the advancement of lower-class citizens and forced the old elite into strategic withdrawal, or *niche* positions, the government later refrained from serious *counter-privileging* (cf. Miethe 2007a, 2007b) and, quite contrary, even tried to stimulate meritocratic elements of societal (re-)differentiation. In the last two decades of “real existing socialism”, the extent of social inequality, for example in the education system of the GDR, surmounted social inequality in many other socialist societies and even some Western capitalist countries. Intergenerational mobility dropped to a minimum: A university graduate with a working-class background became a rare exception, while managers and physicians would as a matter of course send their offspring to secondary schools qualifying for university admission (*Erweiterte Oberschulen*). A worker’s son or daughter could still hope to become a well-trained engineer, but the position as director of a “people-owned” company was more likely to be staffed with someone from an entrepreneur’s family, a white-collar family, or from the intelligentsia (Fig. 3).

Because fewer and fewer candidates met the complete *troika* of requirements – working-class background, party alignment, and professional training, and even less would urge to fill a cadre position at all, compromises had to be made. The legitimacy of the cadre system had been eroded by elite interests since long, and the government eventually embraced a pragmatism based on functional demand (even though the propaganda of equality trumpeted on). Not without subtle irony, Party functionaries were considered ‘honorary workers’, and a considerable share of candidates simply lied about their *bourgeois* father’s or mother’s occupation, i.e., they forged their record on social background in order to clean this spot of bother. As shown with the social backgrounds of 124 Combine Directors from various birth cohorts, anti-elitist principles of recruitment had been gradually discarded. The historical devel-

opment clearly pointed towards social closure, the (neo)-*bourgeoisie* recaptured social influence.

Fig. 3: Social Background of Combine Directors and the Tendency of Self-Reproduction of Elite



4. Running in the Family? Socio-Political *Milieu* Background and the Legacy of the NS Past

Being the functional elite of industry and mostly academically trained, socialist managers could also be described as a part of the technical-scientific *intelligentsia*. However, their self-image as technocratic practitioners and specialists collided with their factual relation to and dependence on the regime.

This refers to an all-German tradition: While the relationship between intellectuals and power is often depicted as conflict i.e., in the context of dissent and resistance, the larger part of the German “educated *bourgeoisie*” (*Bildungsbürgertum*) indeed has a fateful history of entanglement in the web of ideologies and political power.

Despite the pronounced opposition to the National Socialist German past (as well as contrary political means, ends, and ideological contents), the GDR dictatorship wrote a historical *palimpsest* of a society under authoritarian rule wherein elite action was ideologically biased and elites gained a considerable part of their legitimacy from arrangements with the political leadership.

Ironically, the continuity of ideologization of society was the promise of (intergenerational) status continuity for privileged social classes which the

Socialist regime rather intended to disestablish. In its early years, the GDR strongly depended on the well-trained and experienced, even if those were morally compromised and tainted by “shadows of the past” (cf. Best / Salheiser 2006). As thoroughly new elites were yet to be produced, the young socialist society could not be built without integrating the old *bourgeois* strata and their descendents. An anti-fascist social renewal and the proclaimed scientific-economic progress quickly proved incompatible. Thus, status-oriented individuals and families were offered “strategies of survival” under the new Communist rule by adapting to it with overt gestures of alignment, even if they would not embrace it quickly or wholeheartedly. Opportunism and ostentatious loyalty were favored above a spotless family registry. A present SED membership soon became a more important career asset than anything else.

The National Socialist background of GDR elites has recently been revived as a field of scholarly interest by exploring new sources and applying methods of empirical social research (cf. Best/Meentzen 2010, Remy 2010, and their respective articles in this volume). In this chapter, I shall take a broader perspective and discuss the political memberships of socialist managers, their parents and families before and after 1945.

Starting with the political background of socialist managers in the family perspective, remarkable hierarchy level and cohort differences become visible (Fig. 4). While for the vast majority of parents no party membership had been registered at all, there was a significant difference between the percentage of party-affiliated parents of cadres and non-cadres. The higher a cadre in the hierarchy, the more probable was a parent with a party membership. Basically, this holds true for NSDAP and left-wing working-class parties (or post-war East German CP, respectively) the like. NSDAP memberships of parents of course underlies a cohort effect with the generation of cadres born in the 1930s and early 1940s, but this cannot explain away the different shares of *milieu* backgrounds between cadres from different hierarchy levels. Even among the same age cohorts, cadres who had parents without a party affiliation were more common on lower levels than on higher levels. The higher the hierarchy level, the higher was the share of cadres whose fathers were (or had been) SED members. Among parents who belonged to the intelligentsia or white collar professions, party affiliation in general and *former NSDAP membership* in particular (in the respective age cohorts), was far more frequent than among other parents.¹ Most of these parents held no other party membership after the war; *their* historical political experience might have been saturated.

¹ The fathers of cadres from entrepreneur families or the milieu of free professionals had also frequently been NSDAP members. Of course it has to be remembered that Social Democrat and Communist Party had been illegal between 1933 and 1945. Thus, registered memberships were rather rare. In the CCDB, memberships in foreign workers’ parties – such as the CPSU – were also monitored, but they were even rarer.

Fig. 4: Socio-Political Family Milieus, NS and CP Affiliations of Parents

Socio-political family background (%)

(Original categories)	CCDB industry sample	Lower employees	Cadres	Combine Director	Head of Division	Company Director	Head of Department
Resistance fighter	0.1	0.1	0.1	-	0.4	0.1	0.1
Until 1945 Workers Party (CP, SPD)	3.8	2.5	4.6	12.9	7.4	6.3	4.2
From 1945 Workers Party	17.5	20.7	15.6	11.3	18.0	14.4	14.6
East German Party (except SED) = „National Front“ parties	2.6	2.3	2.7	3.2	3.0	3.0	2.6
Father NSDAP	3.7	1.6	4.9	15.3	7.9	8.2	3.6
Father member of NS org.	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.3
Fascist org. - now SED	1.4	1.0	1.7	4.8	1.8	1.8	1.4
Fascist org. - now other party	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.8	0.1	0.8	0.5
No party	70.3	71.6	69.6	50.8	61.2	65.0	72.7

Father: Until 1945 NSDAP (%)

Father: SED (%)
(from 1946 – or CP, CPSU, other foreign CP until 1945)

Mother: SED (%)

CCDB industry sample	5.7	24.6	9.4
Lower employees	2.3	24.5	10.3
Cadres	7.9	24.6	8.7
Combine Director	21.8	33.9	16.1
Head of Division	12.0	30.4	11.0
Company Director	12.7	24.2	9.0
Head of Dept.	6.0	23.0	8.4

What held true for the political family background was even more valid with regard to the cadres' own past: the Party could forgive, but it did not forget.²

Even 44 years after the war, CCDB still contained variables on former Nazi memberships, indicating a sustained relevance.³ There is empirical evidence (cf. Best / Salheiser 2006) that, apparently, there was no substantial need for socialist cadres to “balance” a National Socialist burden by excessive efforts of formal loyalty such as SED functions, honorary memberships in mass organizations, or by a formal qualification level above average. As it seems, former National Socialists integrated rather unsuspiciously. But we have reason to

² On general problems of the abuse of anti-fascism and SED's calculated relation to former NSDAP members, also cf. Ross 2000, Leo / Reif-Spirek 2001, Joseph 2002, Ahbe 2007, Hirschinger 2007, among others.

³ As usual in the GDR, and for the obvious propagandistic reasons, the original coding book of the CCDB avoids the terms “National Socialism” and “National Socialist” and uses the terms “fascism” and “fascist” instead. The CCDB holds records on former memberships in NSDAP, SA, SS, NSKK, NS Lawyers League (*NS-Rechtswahrerbund*), as well as full-time Hitler Youth functions. Remarkably, the categories distinguish between General (*Allgemeiner*) SS and *Waffen-SS*. Furthermore, there are categories like “fascist Wehrmacht“, *Organisation Todt* and *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD). Grotesque enough, records on former memberships in (pre-1933) *Reichswehr*, in West German *Bundeswehr* (!) and even in French Foreign Legion (*Fremdenlegion*) belong to the same variable.

believe that a cadre file entry on the NS past – as a “moral mortgage” – could be used by cadre staff offices as a kind of *reminder* – or as an *insurance*.⁴

Especially East German *economy* depended on the reintegration of old elites and former NS followers (cf. Müller 2004: 221, Müller 1962: 55, Welsh 1991).⁵ A functioning economy was far more important than the protest of rigorous and idealistic communists (cf. Leide 2005) and a lot of former NS followers avidly agreed on that notion and took their chances (cf. Karutz 2003, Kuhlemann 2004).

Of course, being given that “second chance” did not only result in gratitude *per se*, but in the *obligation to gratitude* – or that particular type of a *mutual agreement of silence* that is the first step to blackmail. Even in the 1970s and 1980s, a well documented NS past could still be like the sword of Damocles above a cadre’s head. If there had been any reason to get rid of him or her, the Party or the superior managers would have been given a perfect pretext. And only a few colleagues would have dared to oppose such an act of “anti-fascist purging”, no matter how late and how weak the accusations. Examples are provided by the important manufacturer of optical and electronic equipment, Carl Zeiss Jena, where cadres were ousted from office in 1976 *because* (!) they had been NSDAP and NSKK⁶ members.⁷ In the dossier that led to their removal, someone had made the comforting remark that there was “no concentration” as those two persons (“7 %”) did not work in the same department. However, the Combine Director, Wolfgang Biermann, demanded to “change cadres!”⁸ On the contrary, other Zeiss cadres could stay despite their former SA enlistment; those long-time *Zeissianers* were praised for their commitment “against inadequacies” and “for the cause of the working class”.⁹ As statistics prove, the Jena cases were no exceptions in GDR’s industry.

⁴ In the Federal Archives, documents of the cadre staff departments (*Abteilungen für Kader und Bildung*) of the ten (!) Ministries of Industry of the GDR are preserved. They show that statistics on former NS memberships were no longer produced on a regular basis in the 1980s. With generational change, the issue had ceased to be a major aspect in central personnel planning and coordination. However, this does not mean that the records on the NS past were not used against the persons in question on the micro-level, i.e., by the cadre office staff or the superiors in their company or organization.

⁵ Relatively high shares of NS elite continuity have been observed among managers and specialists in the field of high technology and industries that strongly depended on major investments *and* highly skilled and academically educated staffs such as Middle German chemistry (cf. Wagner-Kyora 2006) or optical industry and precision engineering (Carl Zeiss Jena, cf. Stutz 2006).

⁶ Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps – the Nazi Motor Club.

⁷ Archive source: Mitteilung der Inspektion des Generaldirektors an den Generaldirektor vom 7. Januar 1976, UACZ Jena (Carl Zeiss Jena Company Archives), VA 02200, o. F.

⁸ Translations mine. Ibid., also cf. Remy (2005: 59 f.).

⁹ “Kaderpolitische Analyse des N-Bereichs des KCZ”, ohne Datum (1978), S. 5, UACZ Jena, VA 02200, o. F.

Among socialist managers born before 1928, former anti-fascist resistance fighters or NS victims were the absolute exception. Remarkably, there is a relatively high share of former NSDAP members among female cadres (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5: Political Past and “Fascist” Entanglement

Former membership of cadres born before 1928 (%)									
	CCDB industry sample	Lower employees	Cadres			Exemplary cadre functions			
			total	male	female	Combine. Director	Head division	Comp. Dir.	Head Dept.
CP	0,1	0,4	0,3	0,3	-	-	-	1,6	0,1
Antifa	0,1	-	0,1	0,1	-	-	-	-	0,1
Registered NS victim	0,2	0,1	0,2	0,2	-	-	-	1,6	-
NSDAP	3,1	1,7	3,7	3,6	5,7	--	8,3	2,4	3,2
Hitler Youth (HJ) leader	0,9	0,1	1,2	1,3	-	-	2,8	0,8	1,2
Wehrmacht	43,8	28,2	50,0	52,6		85,7	52,8	54,0	47,7
Waffen-SS	1,3	0,3	1,6	1,7		-	-	-	1,6
Other NS org. incl. SA (General) SS etc.	0,8	0,3	1,0	1,0	-	-	-	0,8	1,1

In particular, the difference between cadres and lower employees is striking. The higher the hierarchy level, the higher the rate of former NSDAP members and full-time Hitler Youth functionaries. Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS service is presented for comparison: although combatant status clearly was the fate of a generation, a hierarchical effect can be noticed as well. In need of explanation, it has to be emphasized that age has been controlled for and that the result is robust.¹⁰

Only on the top level of Combine Directors, there is not a single entry for an NS entanglement. But it can be argued that it was common practice to refrain from feeding such explosive information on celebrity cadres into the CCDB. Generally, cadre statistics were not to be disclosed, and any “homemade” proofs of the National Socialist entanglement of cadres would have been a serious backlash for propaganda, especially as the GDR had already been attacked in West German publications for tolerating former Nazis in its government bodies (“Ehemalige Nationalsozialisten in Pankows Diensten”, cf. Untersuchungsausschuß Freiheitlicher Juristen 1960; also cf. Kappelt 1981).¹¹

¹⁰ Of course, the disproportion of gender in the hierarchy levels has also been controlled for.

¹¹ Kappelt’s *Braunbuch DDR* can hardly be referred to as a differentiated study on the problem of former National Socialists in East Germany. It was designed as an answer to the *Braunbücher* (brown books) which had been published by the GDR propaganda machinery in order to attack West Germany and which partly contained counterfeit information, exag-

Moreover, the disclosure of the NS past of leading cadres would have caused rumors among the lower employees and, thus, weakened the cadres' authority in the companies.¹² In fact, the share of former NSDAP members among Combine Directors might have been similar to the share among Heads of Functional Divisions (*Fachdirektoren*) in the combines. The dark figure certainly was larger on the higher levels than on the lower levels of the hierarchy. It is also possible that the higher shares of cadres and the lower share of (shop-floor level) employees with a NS past are the results of coding practice. At least with regard to "ordinary" Wehrmacht service, the real shares might have been similar but only the information on the cadres was meticulously fed into the statistics (*shifting validity*).

However, I argue that there is another plausible explanation for the curious hierarchical effect. The entanglement of later top-level cadres had already been an indicator of their ambition, their flexibility, and their career orientation. In the Third Reich, they had simply put their trust in a totalitarian regime that had been doomed and eventually destroyed. Later, the authoritarian but peaceful GDR offered longitudinal stability and kept the promise to a youth seduced and betrayed. Only in rare exceptions the cadres were old Nazis or "*Märzgefallene*", most of them had made the typical step from Hitler Youth to NSDAP as teenagers on the notorious April 20 celebrations (until 1944).¹³ Also, socio-political family background had a certain impact.¹⁴ At any rate, an NS past was not a negative career factor that inevitably diminished or destroyed the prospects of GDR industry cadres, but at the same time, malpractice in central and local cadre policy with regard to the NS burden cannot be denied.

Generally speaking, there was no 'kin liability' (*Sippenhaft*) for persons from politically encumbered families in the GDR, neither was there a rigid exclusion of former NS followers from the economic elite stratum. While respective socio-political backgrounds were painstakingly monitored, and basic mistrust might have played a role, an astonishingly high share of cadres on lower to medium hierarchy levels had been members in NS organizations,

generations, and a lot of defamatory statements about politicians and other celebrities of the Federal Republic (cf. Herbst 2004: 91 f.). Consistently, Kappelt also exaggerates – e.g., he does not quite differentiate between 17 years old NSDAP members and SS Troops or perpetrators of NS war crimes (Herbst 2004: 93 f.). On a side note: The preface to Kappelt's *Braunbuch* was written by Otto von Habsburg. Later, Kappelt wrote his PhD thesis in sociology on the denazification in the GDR (Kappelt 1997).

¹² For example in the case of Carl Zeiss' Wolfgang Biermann himself. Biermann's documented NSDAP membership (cf. Herbst et al. 1994: 39, Remy 2005: 59) might have been deliberately erased in the CCDB for ideological reasons. It was more or less unknown in Jena.

¹³ Cf. Frei 2007, Herbst 2004: 96, Kreikamp 2007, Focus 2007, and Heinz Fehlauer's contribution to this volume.

¹⁴ Typically, cadres with a former NSDAP, HJ or Wehrmacht membership also had a characteristic NS family background.

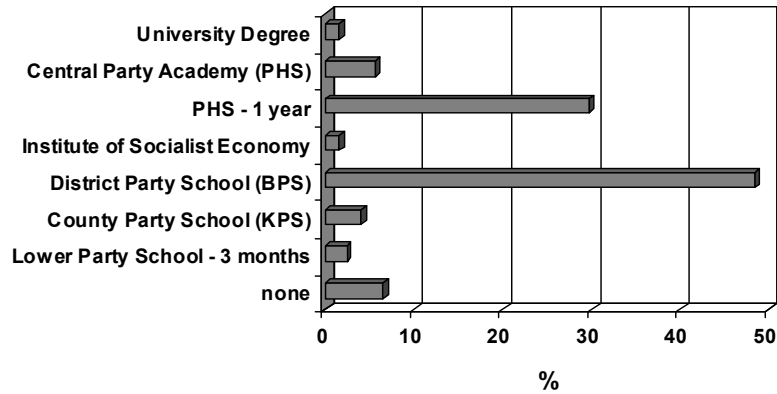
especially if this share is compared to the low share of former anti-fascist activists or NS victims. One explanation of this disproportion is that members of the old intelligentsia were qualified and trained for leading positions in manufacturing departments and economic bureaucracy, while former Communist underground activists and concentration camp prisoners often lacked formal qualification because they had early been excluded from educational institutions of the Third Reich. Other disadvantages of former inmates were their bad health condition, or reduced expectancy of life. Former Nazis or not – foremost of all, from SED’s perspective, cadres had to prove their political loyalty to the socialist regime and its leaders. It is reasonable to think that some cadres felt a strong obligation to excel at this, although statistical analyses provide no specific evidence.

5. Political Loyalty

The SED absolutely insisted on political discipline because this was a cornerstone of her authoritarian rule. All Combine Directors were long-time members of the Party, and many of them held honorary offices in local or regional party bodies and a variety of affiliated mass organizations.

Typically, party alignment was consolidated and expressed by “Party Studies” (Fig. 6); ideological indoctrination which usually took a pseudo-academic appeal at a certain position level and could even result in being awarded a PhD in “Marxism-Leninism” (also cf. Schmeitzner 2005). Ordinary GDR citizens had disrespectfully coined the term “red light therapy” (*Rotlichtbestrahlung*) for the mandatory basic courses, but for some cadres delegation to District Party School (*Bezirksparteischule*) was an honor. Combine Directors attended the top-level courses in Berlin, while the Heads of Functional Divisions or branches in the corporations (*Fachdirektoren*) often managed with less, at a medium level at local party schools. Without doubt, these “political qualifications” had a mostly symbolic value. Nevertheless, they could pay off as career assets one day. And if the Party favored opportunistic mindsets above legitimate pedigrees, for some cadres a strong political commitment could balance the scales.

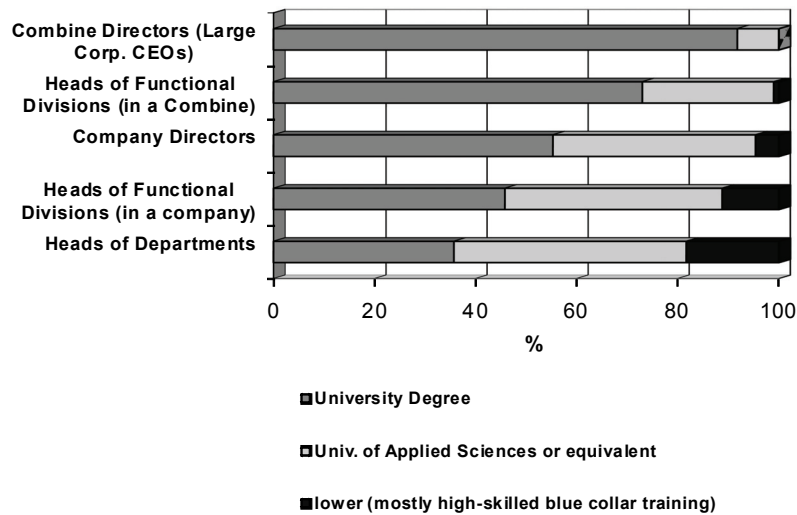
Fig. 6: SED (Communist) Party Schooling of Combine Directors (Large Corp. CEOs) in Centrally Led Industries of the GDR, n=124



6. Vocational Training and Professionalism

There was neither substitute nor compensation for missing *real* qualification and good vocational and professional training (Fig. 7). Virtually all Combine Directors had majored in engineering or economics and graduated at least once at university level, or near-university level. Approximately one third of the Combine Directors held a PhD, mostly in Socialist Economics, and some even had been appointed honorary professors (*Honorarprofessoren*) at their local universities. The concentration of high academic certificates (and the symbolic capital bestowed with it) at the top of the hierarchy is a well-known pattern in West German (capitalist) management and refers back to traditional notions of the German educated bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*). But it takes an ironic turn with the GDR, where the SED originally had promoted the idea of all citizens becoming Comrades, not embracing symbolic distinction.

Fig. 7: Highest Vocational Training / Educational Degrees



7. A Model of Cadre Advancement in Socialist Industry

All in all, social background, political loyalty, and professionalism had an intriguing impact on the composition of upper management collectives, revealing paradoxical effects of social closure and an increasingly sclerotic status order. In confirmative statistical analyses, such as Binary Logistic Regression, the effects of these career determinants can be tested. For the sake of brevity, only a narrow selection of variables from a complex model of cadre recruitment and advancement is discussed here (Fig. 8). CCDB provides data of 349 Combine Directors and Deputy Combine Directors (who held a near-equivalent position in the hierarchy). *Exp.(B)* in the second column of the table specifies the *ceteris paribus* effects of the given variables as career factors, which means that the presence of a trait or achievement improved the statistical odds of advancement to the top by that factor. While Party membership, Party schooling, as well as the certificates of high academic training do have a considerable influence, social background hardly seems to matter at all. But this impression is deceiving because one has to take the variable categories into account which multiply in the equation. A working-class background was coded low, while white collar, intelligentsia, and all rather *bourgeois* backgrounds occupied the higher categories. Accordingly, cadres with blue-collared parents even had a significantly *worse* chance to reach top-level positions. This analysis is based

on full coverage of the GDR management elite, instead of a random sample, which no doubt supports the hypothesis that the disadvantage of workers in the “State of Workers and Peasants” (*Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*) had become structural and systematic.

Fig. 8: Advancement to the Top: Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

Combine Directors (Large Corp. CEOs) and their Deputies ^{1 2}		
<i>Selected Career Determinants</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Sociodemographic		
1. Age in 1989	.978	.424n.s.
2. Gender	.315	.029*
Social and Political		
3. Social background	1.171	.003**
4. Wife: housewife	2.429	.029*
5. Number of children	.924	.547n.s.6.
6. SED (Communist Party) membership	9.541	.000***
7. Age when joining the SED ³	1.023	.578n.s.
8. Number of memberships in mass organizations	.853	.249n.s.
9. Number of honorary functions	1.360	.000***
10. SED (Communist) Party schooling	4.521	.000***
11. Military service	.542	.036*
Professional		
12. Highest vocational training	.744	.197n.s.
13. Age when granted first university degree ³	.928	.028*
14. University degree AND university of applied sciences degree	1.750	.029*
15. University degree in Economics	1.497	.259n.s.
16. PhD or equivalent	4.436	0.041*
Symbolic		
17. Decorations (Value Sum Index)	1.005	.000***
Career Dynamics (from Optimal Matching of Career Sequences)		
18. Fast Career Advancement Type	1.279	0.048*

¹ NOC=349. Reference category: Heads of Departments (random sample, NOC=349)

Pseudo-R²: *Cox & Snell* 0.528, *Nagelkerke* 0.703 ²Incl. only persons born before 1945.

³ Miss. cases automatically excl. from analysis. Age coefficients computed separately for all cases

8. Conclusion: Class Society Revived

The findings discussed here illustrate once more the limitations of the socialist ideology and the cadre system with regard to the realism of its claims. Central societal planning and control is confined to the mere shaping of the institutional framework, but it cannot overrule the very foundations of social action, or human behavior, such as the tendency of status reproduction within families, and its ramifications for social structure in the long run.

The communist government had tried to accelerate the wheel of societal “progress”, and seemed to succeed in doing so for a certain time, but then the wheel took an awkward leap and finally snapped back. Socialist cadres in the

GDR of the late 1980s were no longer the proletarian avant-garde they once supposed to be, they were a clearly elevated stratum in a *petit-bourgeois* society. The class structure of the GDR had already sallied out to post-socialist shores. Destitute of imperative validity, the ideological tradition of egalitarian principles was no longer more than a self-deceit.

References

- Ahbe, Thomas. 2007. *Der DDR-Antifaschismus. Diskurse und Generationen – Kontexte und Identitäten. Ein Rückblick über 60 Jahre. Texte zur politischen Bildung*, no. 39. Leipzig.
- Best, Heinrich, and Axel Salheiser. 2006. Shadows of the Past: National Socialist Backgrounds of the GDR's Functional Elites. *German Studies Review*, vol. XXIX, no. 3: 589-602.
- Best, Heinrich and Sandra Meenzen. 2010. „Da ist nichts gewesen.“ SED-Funktionäre mit NSDAP-Vergangenheit in Thüringen. *Deutschland Archiv*, no. 2: 222-231.
- Best, Heinrich. 2003. Sozialismus in der DDR: Ein Feldexperiment mit paradoxalem Ergebnis. *Historical Social Research*, vol. 28, special issue 1 / 2: 128-60.
- Best, Heinrich. 2004. Wenn Quantität in Qualität umschlägt: Die Prosopographie der DDR-Funktionseleiten als Beitrag zur Hermeneutik der realsozialistischen Lebenswelt. In *Soziale Struktur und wissenschaftliche Praxis im Wandel. Festschrift für Heinz Sahner*, ed., Michael Bayer and Sören Petermann, 137-55. Wiesbaden.
- Best, Heinrich. 2005. Cadres into Managers: Structural Changes of East German Economic Elites before and after Reunification. *Historical Social Research*, vol. 30, no. 112, Special Issue 2: 6-24.
- Best, Heinrich. 2009. Did Family Matter? The Formation and Reproduction of Functional Elites in a Socialist Society. In *Elites and Social Change. The Socialist and Post-Socialist Experience*, Ibid., ed. Ronald Gebauer and Axel Salheiser, 13-24. Hamburg.
- Engels, Friedrich. 1987. *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats. Im Anschluss an Lewis H. Morgans Forschungen*. 16. Auflage. Berlin.
- Focus. 2007. Exklusiv: Wie Dieter Hildebrandt, Martin Walser und Siegfried Lenz NSDAP-Mitglieder wurden. *Focus*, no. 27: 22-25.
- Frei, Norbert (interviewee). 2007. Ein Interview mit dem Historiker Norbert Frei über die NSDAP-Mitgliedschaft von Martin Walser, Dieter Hildebrandt und Siegfried Lenz. *Die Zeit*, vol. 62., no. 28: 48.
- Herbst, Andreas et al. 1994. *So funktionierte die DDR. Band 3: Lexikon der Funktionäre*. Reinbek bei Hamburg.
- Herbst, Andreas. 2004. Nazis in der Bundesrepublik und in der DDR. *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 40. no. 1: 91-98.
- Hirschinger, Frank. 2007. *Fälschung und Instrumentalisierung antifaschistischer Biographien*. Göttingen.
- Joseph, Detlef. 2002. *Nazis in der DDR. Die deutschen Staatsdiener nach 1945*. Berlin.
- Kappelt, Olaf. 1981. *Braunbuch DDR. Nazis in der DDR*. Berlin.

- Kappelt, Olaf. 1997. *Die Entnazifizierung in der SBZ sowie die Rolle und der Einfluß ehemaliger Nationalsozialisten in der DDR als ein soziologisches Phänomen*. Hamburg.
- Karutz, Annemarie. 2003. *Von der Idealisierung des Nationalsozialismus zur Idealisierung des Kommunismus. Eine biographietheoretische Verlaufsstudie früherer SED-Genossen von 1990 bis 1999*. Gießen
- Kreikamp, Hans-Dieter (interviewee). 2007. NSDAP: Archivleiter Hans Dieter Kreikamp über Walser, Lenz und Hildebrandt. *Focus*, no. 28: 40-41.
- Kuhlemann, Jens. 2004. *Braune Kader. Ehemalige Nationalsozialisten in der Deutschen Wirtschaftskommission und der DDR-Regierung (1948-1957)*. PhD thesis, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena.
- Leide, Henry. 2005. *NS-Verbrecher und Staatssicherheit: die geheime Vergangenheitspolitik der DDR*. Göttingen.
- Leo, Annette and Peter Reif-Spirek, eds.. 2001. *Vielstimmiges Schweigen. Neue Studien zum DDR-Antifaschismus*. Berlin.
- Miethe, Ingrid. 2007a. *Bildung und soziale Ungleichheit in der DDR. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer gegenprivilegierenden Bildungspolitik*. Opladen.
- Miethe, Ingrid. 2007b. Der Mythos von der Chancengleichheit. Die Bildungspolitik der DDR zwischen Gegenprivilegierung, Machtsicherung und Reproduktion von Ungleichheit. *Zeitschrift des Forschungsverbundes SED-Staat*, no. 21: 35-54.
- Müller, Armin. 2004. Die erste Generation der Werkleiter in der SBZ / DDR. Drei Volkseigene Betriebe im Vergleich. *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte*, vol. 49, no. 2: 198-221.
- Müller, Karl Valentin. 1962. *Die Manager in der Sowjetzone. Eine empirische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der wirtschaftlichen und militärischen Führungsschicht in Mitteldeutschland*. Köln.
- Remy, Dietmar. 2005. Kaderauswahl und Karrierekriterien beim Kombinat VEB Carl Zeiss Jena in der Ära Biermann. *Historical Social Research*, vol. 30, no. 112, special issue 2: 50-72.
- Remy, Dietmar. 2010. Beargewöhnt und unentbehrlich: Die Funktionselite des „Dritten Reiches“ als Aufbauhelfer der DDR. Eine Fallstudie zum Zeiss-Betriebsleiter Rudolf Müller. *DeutschlandArchiv*, no. 2: 232-236.
- Ross, Gordon C. 2000. *The swastika in socialism: right wing extremism in the GDR*. Hamburg.
- Salheiser, Axel. 2009a. *Parteitreu, plangemäß, professionell? Rekrutierungsmuster und Karriereverläufe von DDR-Industriekadern*. Wiesbaden.
- Salheiser, Axel. 2009b. Directors of Combines in Centrally Led Industries of the GDR. In *Elites and Social Change – The Socialist and Post-Socialist Experience*, ed. Heinrich Best, Ronald Gebauer and dto., 25-36. Hamburg.
- Schmeitzner, Mike. 2005. Totale Herrschaft durch Kader? Parteischulung und Kaderpolitik von NSDAP und KPD / SED. *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, vol. 2, no. 1: 71-99.
- Sorokin, Pitirim A. 1926. Soziale Bewegungsvorgänge. *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Soziologie*, vol. 6, 1926 / 1927: 146-152.
- Stutz, Rüdiger. 2006. “Surviving the Swastika?” The Advancement of Zeiss Managers in Nazi Germany and the Postwar East German State. *German Studies Review*, vol. XXIX, no. 3: 603-610.

- Untersuchungsausschuß Freiheitlicher Juristen, ed.. 1960. *Ehemalige Nationalsozialisten in Pankows Diensten*. 3rd, revised edition. Berlin.
- Wagner-Kyora, Georg. 2006. Continuities in the Identity Construction of Industrial Chemists 1940-1970. *German Studies Review*, vol. XXIX, no. 3, October 2006: 611-620.
- Welsh, Helga A. 1991. Entnazifizierung in der DDR und die „Wende“. In *Wendezeiten – Zeitenwände. Zur „Entnazifizierung“ und „Entstalinisierung“*, ed. Rainer Eckert, Alexander von Plato, and Jörn Schütrumpf, 65-76. Hamburg.